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The stigma of making a living from garbage:
Meta-stereotypes of trash pickers in León (Nicaragua).

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Abstract.
The article analyzes various aspects related to the meta-stereotype of 99 trash pickers who made their living from the garbage dumps in León (Nicaragua). This group is difficult to access, heavily stigmatized, and lives in extreme poverty. All the pickers in the city were interviewed using a heteroapplied structured interview. The results show that people who obtained their livelihood from garbage in the city of León had a mainly negative meta-stereotype, albeit one to which was some extent indulgent, which could have a negative impact on their processes of social inclusion. The content of the meta-stereotype had a high degree of uniformity, with few variations between the respondents. However, some differences were observed in the use of some attributes in the meta-stereotype according to age, cohabitation with a partner and/or with parents, income level, engagement in paid work apart from picking garbage and the respondents' expectations for the future.

Keywords: trash pickers, stigma, social exclusion, meta-stereotypes, poverty

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Introduction

The term "stigma" was used in ancient Greece, where the skin of criminals, slaves and traitors was marked with cuts and burns to identify them as contaminated or immoral people, who should be avoided (Goffman, 1963). Today, stigma does not refer to physical marks, but instead to attributes that lead to social rejection, which can take the form of an aversion to interaction, avoidance, disrepute, dehumanization and depersonalization. The origin of stigmatization lies in the subjects' cognitive representations of those who possess certain characteristics, and these representations can lead to emotional reactions and negative behaviours. Stigmatization occurs in social interactions, and as such stigma occurs not in individuals but in the social context (Hebl & Dovidio, 2005), meaning that what is stigmatizing in one social context may not be in another.

Individuals' awareness of the existence of a social stigma can lead to self-stigma. Like stigma, self-stigma has cognitive, affective and behavioural components (Mak & Cheung, 2008) and operates at both an implicit and explicit level (Rusch, Corrigan, Todd & Bodenhausen, 2011). The most important cognitive components of stigma and self-stigma are stereotypes and meta-stereotypes. The concept of the stereotype was coined by Lippmann (1922), who defined it as "pictures in our heads", which reflect the tendency to think that people or things that belong to the same category have similar characteristics. Subsequently, other authors defined stereotypes as "exaggerated beliefs" (Allport, 1954) and linked them to processes of social categorization (Tajfel, 1969). In general, the definitions of a stereotype stress that they tend to attribute general psychological characteristics to human groups.

Social behaviour towards certain groups, and especially those that are stigmatized and suffering from social exclusion, are strongly mediated by stereotypes, which are closely linked to discriminatory behaviour (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). In the case of people who make their living from garbage, the stereotypes have very negative characteristics (Vázquez, Panadero, & Martín, 2012; Vázquez, 2013; Vázquez & Panadero, 2016), which has an impact on negative attitudes toward this group that hinder their processes of integration (Hocking & Lawrence, 2000; Mallet et al., 2003). As noted by Kurzban & Leary (2001), humans have a strong tendency to avoid people who are socially excluded.

In addition to personality traits and the evaluation thereof, the stereotypes of an outgroup maintained by the members of a group also include what the members of the outgroup think about the ingroup (Wilder, 1984). Whether as a result of direct or vicarious exposure to prejudicial behaviour, socialization within the group itself and/or other social learning mechanisms, the members of a stereotyped group may notice and become aware of the cognitive representations that members of other groups have of them (Saiz, Merino and Quilaqueo, 2009). Awareness of the stereotype leads to evaluations of the ingroup by the outgroup, with a dual component: a) the content of the stereotype that the ingroup members believe the outgroup has of them, and b) evaluation of the stereotype. The content and its evaluation are the two sides of a stereotype.

According to the scientific literature, there are positive correlations between cognitive variables (e.g. stereotypes and meta-stereotypes), emotions (e.g. fear, mistrust) and behaviours (e.g. discrimination, rejection, avoidance) (Zanna & Rempel, 1988), and as such stereotypes and meta-stereotypes may act as cognitions which by their nature hinder the integration processes of certain groups. Vorauer, Main and O'Connell (1998) used the term "meta-stereotype" to refer to the beliefs held by the members of a group regarding the stereotypes assigned to them by an outgroup. Shelton and Richeson (2005) highlighted the tendency for individuals to avoid contact with members of other groups when they believe that these groups do not wish to come into contact with them, and the different attributions in both groups as to why the members of the outgroup do not want to initiate these contacts. In general, fear and anxiety about how they can expect to be treated make people avoid contact, which hinders normalization processes.

Saiz et al. (2009) highlight the importance of addressing two specific aspects when analyzing meta-stereotypes: content and the degree of uniformity. The content of a meta-stereotype refers to the set of attributes within it, and implies the evaluation of the group by the outgroup (Gómez, 2002). The uniformity of the meta-stereotype refers to the degree of consensus among the members of the ingroup regarding the attributes assigned to them by the outgroup. For an attribute to be meta-stereotypical, this belief must be shared by a significant proportion of the ingroup, i.e. there must be some degree of agreement within the ingroup that the outgroup perceives it as having a particular attribute (Finchilescu, 2005). Greater uniformity of meta-stereotypical beliefs may reflect a greater relevance of those beliefs within the ingroup, and hence cause more intense effects during interaction with members of the outgroup (Triandis et al, 1982; Saiz et al, 2009).

Nicaragua, with an estimated population of 5.5 million inhabitants, is one of the countries in Latin America with the lowest levels of development (UNDP, 2013). 11.9% of Nicaragua's population lives on less than 1.25 dollars a day, and 46.2% live below the national poverty line (UNDP, 2013). León, the country's second most important city after the capital, has a population of approximately 185,000 inhabitants. Estimates suggest that more than half the city's inhabitants live below the poverty line, and that major groups of the population live in extreme poverty (Vazquez, et al., 2012).

The weakness of the Nicaraguan productive system and the increase in people living in extreme poverty in recent decades have forced relatively large groups of people to seek their livelihood in landfill dumps, with the serious health problems and the heavy stigmatization that this entails. While the bulk of these people's work consists of selecting and collecting items that can be sold for recycling - mainly plastic, metal, glass, cloth, paper and cardboard - they also collect basic goods from the garbage for their own direct consumption (food, clothing, footwear, household goods, etc.) (Vazquez et al., 2012). People who collect items from the garbage in León, among whom the presence of minors is commonplace, do so without any personal protection, only using a bag to carry what they have collected and a metal hook for poking.

Despite being the object of social disdain, the work done by the pickers is important in societies where the state is less developed, as it prevents many tons of solid waste from increasing the size of landfills, and enables raw materials to be delivered at low cost to various industries. Nonetheless, although the pickers do work that is socially useful,

economically productive and environmentally beneficial, they usually suffer from strong stigmatization, and their work is related to marginalization (Vázquez, 2013).

At various meetings with the people who make their living from garbage in the city of Leon, we discussed the question of what they wanted to be called, given the stigmatizing connotations of most of the names used to refer to them. The term considered in the most positive light by these people was "pickers," as they felt that it lacked negative connotations, and for that reason, in this paper we use that term to refer to the people who make their living from collecting garbage.

Method

The participants in the research were 99 pickers in León (Nicaragua), a group that is difficult to access, heavily stigmatized, and lives in extreme poverty. When the study was undertaken, the number of people making a living from garbage in Leon was well defined, meaning that it was possible to interview all the pickers: 92 worked mainly in the metropolitan landfill dump and seven worked in the old city dump, which has become an illegal landfill.

The work involved in approaching the sample began by holding separate meetings with both the pickers who worked in the landfill dump and the illegal dump, and with community leaders, who helped to draft a list that included all the pickers in the city. After the list was completed, the participants were located with the support of community leaders and the pickers' neighbours, relatives, colleagues and friends. After each interviewee had been located, the purpose of the research was explained to them and their consent to the interview was requested. When the person agreed to cooperate (which happened in all cases), an appointment was made in a community centre in the dump, at the home of a community leader or in their own home, where the interview was conducted.

The information was collected using a heteroapplied structured interview, which enabled the problems associated with the pickers' difficulties with reading and understanding to be circumvented. The structured interview collected information on various related to individuals making their living from garbage in the city of León: socio-demographic characteristics, home and cohabitation, education, employment situation and income, social support, health, victimization, general happiness, future prospects, meta-stereotype, etc.
In order to gather information about the meta-stereotype, the pickers were asked the following question: "*In general, Do you believe people think that the folks that make a living from garbage…?* " followed by 41 statements about characteristics that the general population could potentially attribute to them (see Table 2). The interviewees only had to express their agreement or disagreement with the various statements. Three discussion group meetings with pickers in various neighbourhoods of León took place prior to the preparation of the instrument, and these provided very important information for the production of the final instrument.

The main demographic characteristics of the pickers in León (Vázquez & Panadero, 2016) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Main socio-demographic characteristics of trash pickers in León (Nicaragua).

Characteristics	n	Percentage / mean (SD)
Sex		
Male	72	72.7%
Female	27	27.3%
Age (mean (SD)	99	32.3 years (11.56)
14 to 19 years old	10	10.1%
20 to 29 years old	34	34.3%
30 to 39 years old	30	30.3%
Over 40 years old	25	25.3%
Marital status		
Single	27	27.3%
Married	20	20.2%
Stable de facto union	49	49.5%
Separated	2	2.0%
Widow/er	1	1.0%
Number of children (mean (SD)	99	2.8 children (2.26)
No children	13	13.1%
One child	23	23.2%
Two children	14	14.1%
Three children	17	17.2%
Four children	13	13.1%
Five children	9	9.1%
More than five children	10	10.1%
Number of people lived with - mean (SD)	99	7.5 people (4.52)
Age when his/her first child was born - mean (SD)	86	18.6 years (4.96)
Age at which he/she began living with his/her partner - mean (SD)	91	17.0 years (3.60)
Monthly income		
Less than 25 dollars	11	12.5%
25 to 40 dollars	34	38.6%
40 to 65 dollars	14	15.9%
More than 65 dollars	29	33.0%

As shown in Table 1, 73% of the pickers in León were men, with a mean age of 32.4 years old. The women had a mean age of 36.5 years old (SD = 12.37), which was significantly higher than that of the men (mean age = 30.85 years old, SD = 10.94) (t = 2.215, p = .029). 63.0% of the women and 52.8% of the men were over 29 years old. Ten pickers (eight males and two females) were aged between 14 and 19 years old, and three of them were under 16. A quarter of the respondents were over 40 years old.

The vast majority of the respondents (92%) said they live or had lived as part of a couple at some point, and on average, they began their relationship when they were 17 years

old. All the women interviewed had lived as a part of a couple, and only eigth men had never done so. The women began living with their partner at a mean age of 14.7 years old (SD = 1.71), while the men did so at a mean age of 17.9 years old (SD = 3.77) (t = 5.581, p =.000). 69.7% of the interviewees were in a relationship at the time of the interview, which were mostly de facto unions. Only three pickers - all of whom were women - who had lost their partners did not have a new partner when interviewed. The vast majority of the pickers in León (86.9%) had children.

The pickers in León had a mean of 3 children, although 13% had no children, while 20% had five or more. The women had on average more children than the men: a mean of 4.1 children for the women (SD = 2.70) compared to a mean of 2.3 children for the men (SD = 1.87) (t = -3.45, p = 000). Of the respondents who had children, 52.3% had their first child before they were 18 years old, and 8.1% did so before they were 15 years old. Statistically significant differences according to sex were observed with regard to the age at which the pickers had their first child. Among the men, the mean age was 19.6 years old (SD = 5.53) and among the women the mean age was 16.3 years old (SD = 1.76) (t = 4.242, p = .000).

Despite the small size of the pickers' homes (two thirds of which had only one or two rooms), the respondents lived with a mean of 7.5 people (SD = 4.52). One third of the pickers were unable to read or write, and only 16% had completed primary education. More than half of the pickers earned less than 40 dollars per month, i.e. less than 1.5 dollars a day.

The database was developed and processed using the SPSS statistical analysis and data management system. The data obtained were used to perform a descriptive analysis that included the information about the pickers. When making comparisons, the χ^2 "Chi square" statistic was used for nominal variables, and the "Student t test for independent samples" was used for continuous variables.

Results

The results obtained for the meta-stereotype of garbage pickers in León are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Meta-stereotype of trash pickers in Leon (Nicaragua)

In general, Do you believe people think that the folks that make a living from garbage…?	Yes		No		DK / NA	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Are dirty and poor people	91.9	91	7.1	7	1.0	1
Lack economic resources	89.9	89	8.1	8	2.0	2
Are malnourished	88.9	88	9.1	9	2.0	2
Don't wash properly, they're dirty	84.8	85	13.1	13	1.0	1
Live hand to mouth and don't think about the future	75.8	76	20.2	20	3.0	3
Have had a difficult past	75.8	76	19.2	19	4.0	4
Are unfortunate, they have been unlucky	74.7	75	20.2	21	3.0	3
Are sick	73.7	73	24.2	24	2.0	2
Are rejected by society	69.7	79	28.3	28	2.0	2
Appreciate things more	69.7	69	24.2	24	6.1	6
Are physically and psychologically worn out	68.7	68	26.3	26	5.1	5

In general, Do you believe people think that the folks that make a living from garbage…?	Yes		No		DK / NA	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Are enterprising, fighters	68.7	69	28.3	28	2.0	2
Are hard-working	68.7	69	29.3	29	1.0	1
Are tough, resistant	67.7	68	24.2	24	7.1	7
Are useless, they can't contribute anything to society	67.7	68	27.3	27	4.0	4
Are victims of the system	65.7	66	21.2	21	12.1	12
Are consumers of alcohol	65.7	66	32.3	33	0.0	0
Are criminals	64.6	65	33.3	33	1.0	1
Are defenceless	64.6	65	29.3	29	5.1	5
Are drug users	62.6	63	36.4	36	0.0	0
Are distrustful	59.6	60	35.4	35	4.0	4
Are argumentative, problematic	57.6	58	39.4	39	2.0	2
Are rebels	58.6	59	38.4	38	2.0	2
Lack motivation	56.6	56	33.3	33	10.1	10
Have poor social relationships	56.6	57	40.4	40	2.0	2
Are wasteful	56.6	57	38.4	38	4.0	4
Have low self-esteem	56.6	57	31.3	31	11.1	11
Are sociable	55.6	56	35.4	35	8.1	8
Have a weak character	55.6	56	39.4	39	4.0	4
Lack moral values	54.5	55	29.3	29	15.2	15
Are caring	53.5	53	33.3	33	13.2	13
Are idle	52.5	53	44.4	44	2.0	2
Are dangerous	52.5	53	45.5	45	1.0	1
Are courteous, respectful, polite	49.5	50	48.5	48	1.0	1
Are lazy	46.5	46	49.5	50	3.0	3
Are mentally ill	44.4	44	49.5	50	5.1	5
Are normal, like everyone else	43.4	43	53.5	54	2.0	2
Blame others for their situation	42.4	42	52.5	53	4.0	4
Are happy	41.4	41	56.6	57	1.0	1
Are clean	27.3	27	70.7	71	1.0	1
Deserve pity	22.2	23	74.7	75	1.0	1

As shown in Table 2, most interviewees believed that the general population considered pickers to be dirty and poor people (92%), lacking financial resources (90%), malnourished (89%), living from hand to mouth and lacking a vision of the future (76%), with a difficult past (76%). A small percentage of the respondents believed that the general population considers them people worthy of pity (22%), neat (27%) and happy (41%), like other people (43%).

No statistically significant differences were observed in any of the attributes associated with the meta-stereotype shown in Table 2 based on gender (male vs. female), declared

happiness (happy vs. unhappy), perceived state of health (good-very good vs. reasonable-bad) or living with children (living with children vs. not living with children).

However, differences were observed in the attributes of the meta-stereotype used by pickers in León according to age (Table 3), living with a partner and living with a parent (Table 4), monthly income and complementing garbage picking with other paid work apart from garbage picking (Table 5) and future expectations (Table 6).

Table 3. Differences in the meta-stereotype of trash pickers in León (Nicaragua) depending on age

In general, Do you believe people think that the folks that make a living from garbage…?	Less than 32 years old (n=55)		Over 33 years old (n=43)		
	%	n	%	n	χ^2
Are distrustful	45.5	25	79.1	34	11.389**
Deserve pity	66.7	36	88.4	38	6.435*
Lack moral values	49.1	27	62.8	27	6.733*

*p $\leq$.05;**p$\leq$.01;***p$\leq$ .001

As shown in Table 3, the older pickers believed to a greater extent that they were perceived by the general population to be lacking moral values, untrustworthy and worthy of pity.

Table 4. Differences in the meta-stereotype of trash pickers in León (Nicaragua) depending on cohabitation with a spouse or partner and depending on cohabitation with a parent

In general, Do you believe people think that the folks that make a living from garbage…?	Live with their spouse/partner (n=67)		Do not live with their spouse/partner (n=32)		
	%	**n**	**%**	**n**	χ^2
Lack economic resources	95.5	64	78.1	25	8.247*
Are idle	49.3	33	61.3	19	6.515*
Are defenceless	71.6	48	51.6	16	7.242*
Are enterprising, fighters	76.1	51	54.8	17	7.337*
In general, Do you believe people think that the folks that make a living from garbage…?	**Live with a parent (n=25)**		**Do not live with a parent (n=74)**		
	%	**n**	**%**	**n**	χ^2
Are rejected by society	68.0	17	70.3	52	6.151*
Lack economic resources	84.0	21	91.9	68	6.050*
Are physically and psychologically worn out	76.0	19	66.2	49	6.049*
Are sick	80.0	20	71.6	53	8.166*
Are malnourished	84.0	21	90.5	67	6.054*
Have poor social relationships	50.0	12	59.5	44	6.456*
Are lazy	29.2	7	52.7	39	6.018*

*p ≤.05;**p≤.01;***p≤.001

Table 4 shows that the individuals living as part of a couple tended to believe that the general population had a more positive image of pickers in terms of being defenceless, enterprising and fighters, not being idle and lacking resources.

Also, table 4 shows that those who did not live with their parents believed that the general population has a more negative opinion of the pickers than those who lived with one or more parents. While the percentages in agreement with all the statements are considerably high, those who were not living with their parents believed to a greater extent that pickers were perceived to be lazy, lacking financial resources, malnourished, with poor social relationships and socially rejected. Meanwhile, those who lived with one or more parents believed to a greater extent that pickers were perceived as sick, and physically and psychologically worn out.

Table 5. Differences in the meta-stereotype of trash pickers in León (Nicaragua) depending on monthly income and depending on whether they do paid work apart from picking garbage

In general, Do you believe people think that the folks that make a living from garbage…?	Monthly income				
	Less than 600 córdobas (24 $) (n=15)		More than 1,500 córdobas (60 $) (n=31)		
	%	n	%	n	χ^2
Are defenceless	53.3	8	80.6	25	7.500*
Blame others for their situation	26.7	4	58.1	18	6.079*
Are victims of the system	40.0	6	80.6	25	8.054*

In general, Do you believe people think that the folks that make a living from garbage…?	Do paid work apart from picking garbage				
	No (n=83)		Yes (n=16)		
	%	n	%	n	χ^2
Are sick	74.4	62	68.8	11	10.667**
Are malnourished	90.4	75	81.3	13	10.670**
Are clean	30.1	25	13.3	2	7.015*
Are happy	38.6	32	60.0	9	8.687*
Are caring	48.8	40	86.7	13	7.575*
Don't wash properly, they're dirty	84.3	70	93.3	14	8.003*
Are tough, resistant	63.9	53	93.3	14	5.958*
Are hard-working	67.5	56	80.0	12	7.403*

*p ≤.05;**p≤.01;***p≤.001

As shown in Table 5, the subgroup of pickers with the highest incomes believed that in some respects, the general population had a more indulgent perception of the pickers than the subgroup with lower incomes: more of them believed that the pickers were seen as defenceless and victims of the system, who blame others for their situation.

More respondents who did paid work in addition to picking garbage believed that the general population thought that pickers were happy, caring, strong, tough and hard-working, although this was in addition to being dirty and not washing properly. Meanwhile, more of those whose only source of income was garbage believed that the general population considered pickers to be sick and malnourished, although cleaner.

Table 6. Differences in the meta-stereotype of trash pickers in León (Nicaragua) depending on their future expectations

In general, Do you believe people think that the folks that make a living from garbage…?	Believe that their outlook for the future is ...						
	Better than in the present (n=70)		The same as the present (n=23)		Worse than the present (n=5)		
	%	n	%	n	%	n	χ^2
Have a weak character	52.9	37	56.5	13	100.0	5	10.898*
Are criminals	65.7	46	60.9	14	80.0	4	20.731***

*p ≤.05;**p≤.01;***p≤.001

Table 6 shows that those interviewed who declared the worse expectations for the future tended to a great extent to believe that the general population perceived pickers to be weak in character and criminals.

Discussion and Conclusions

Most of the pickers who made their living from the garbage in León lived in extreme poverty, with income levels of less than 1.5 dollars a day. They are mainly young men, probably due to the harsh nature of the work they do, which besides requiring the physical strength to move garbage, is performed in a hostile environment, at very high temperatures, among smoke, dust and insect bites, and disputes over access to the garbage occur often (Vázquez, 2013; Vázquez & Panadero, 2016). The relative youth of the pickers - only a quarter of them were more than forty years old - could also be attributed to the nature of the work they do and their habitual consumption of food they collect in the garbage, the pickers have a high level of exposure to injury and/or serious illness, which can lead to them being forced to stop picking at an early age. The 27 women who worked in picking had an older average age than the men, and the main leader of the pickers in León was one of the women who worked as a picker.

Perhaps because of the stigma they suffer, picker's have difficulty interacting with the rest of the population, and have created a specific lifestyle that detaches them from it, with behaviour patterns that are subject to social disapproval by Nicaraguan society, and this could affect the accentuation and perpetuation of the stigma they experience. For example, among the pickers there is a high proportion of de facto unions and a very low percentage of marriages. This could be associated with the large number of changes of partner that take place in this group, as well as to difficulties in getting married and a lack of interest in formalizing their legal status as a couple. The high rate of partner change that is observed among the pickers could be due to the fact that their first stable relationships begin at very young ages. This increases the potential for their break-up, as well as a high level of tolerance within this social context to changes partners and heavy social pressure, especially among the women, to find a partner. Despite the extreme poverty they suffer, a quarter of the pickers had at least five children. The women, who had twice as many children as the men,

had their first child at a mean age of 16 years old, three years earlier than the men, although most of the men and the women had their first child before reaching the adult legal age of 18. Lack of sex education, difficulties obtaining effective contraceptive methods and cultural issues related to paternity/maternity make teen pregnancies the norm among female pickers. Pickers' lived in conditions of overcrowding; two thirds of their homes had one or two rooms and on average, more than seven people lived in each one.

Despite doing work that is socially useful, economically productive and environmentally beneficial (Vázquez, 2013; Vázquez & Panadero, 2016), the pickers in León are heavily stigmatized. This stigma was perceived by the pickers, who believed that the rest of the population had a negative view of their group, which was strongly reflected in the meta-stereotype. The pickers' meta-stereotype had a high degree of uniformity, indicative of a high level of consensus on the attributes assigned to them by the general population (Saiz et al., 2009). The meta-stereotype also tended to be very unfavourable, albeit sometimes indulgent. The indulgent meta-stereotype is an ambivalent image, which despite presenting negative characteristics has a condescending outlook, which considers the pickers to be victims of circumstance, affected by the situation in which they find themselves Eventhough, this indulgent meta-stereotype may not result very pellorative like the negative meta-stereotypes, it seems not to have a positive influence in the social inclusion processes of the garbage pickers, as it is drawn from the fact that a relevant part of these, going ahead and using indulgent meta-stereotype, staying in a chronic manner in extreme poverty and social exclusion.

Despite the meta-stereotypes being indulgent to a certain extent, the high degree of uniformity in the unfavorable meta-stereotypes maintained by the pickers could be affecting how they perceive the rest of the population, and probably plays an important and determinant role with their contacts with it. This is because the experience of being negatively stereotyped affects social perception and affective reactions to the outgroup, and may contribute to an avoidance of contact, or if this avoidance is impossible, to hostile reactions to the outgroup. Some differences may exist between sustaining negative meta-esteriotypes and indulgen meta-stereotypes, given that the later could have a positive incidence on encouraging intergroup contact and reduction of hostile reactions towards the outgroup. Furthermore, these unfavourable and uniform meta-stereotypes may influence the image that the pickers have of their own ingroup and therefore of their power to change their situation, as the meta-stereotype may influence how the ingroup defines itself. Even so, an indulgent meta-stereotype could result more positive for the self-esteem of the picker than a negative meta-stereotype, as perceiving less responsibility for their situation from the outer-group. The pickers' tendency to avoid contact with members of other groups when they believe that these groups do not wish to come into contact with them leads to the pickers and the general population making different attributions as to why the members of the outgroup do not want to initiate these contacts. Among the pickers, fear and anxiety about how they can expect to be treated thus lead to an avoidance of contact, while among the general population, attributions for the isolation engaged in by the pickers may lead to an exacerbation of the stigma that they suffer from. The lack of contact leads to an increase in the attribution of dangerousness to the outgroup, with a negative impact on the stereotype and meta-stereotype affecting the stigmatized group.

The high degree of uniformity of the meta-stereotype is indicative of a broad consensus regarding the attributes assigned to them by the general population. Most of the pickers believed the general population had a very negative image of their group, believing them to be dirty and poor people without economic resources or a vision of the future. A relatively high percentage of pickers also believed that the rest of the population had an indulgent image of their group, perceiving them to have had a difficult past and very bad luck, and to be sick, malnourished, physically and psychologically worn out and socially rejected. Only a small percentage of the respondents believed that the general population had a positive image of the pickers, and believed them to be neat and happy people, like others, albeit people to be pitied.

The uniformity of the meta-stereotype also means that the differences in terms of the pickers' various characteristics are largely anecdotal, although there were some differences in some perceived attributes based on certain characteristics that could be significant. An analysis of the differences observed in the inclusion of some attributes in the meta-stereotype may help with an analysis of some factors that affect how the pickers perceive themselves to be considered, with the implications that this has on their emotions, behaviours and their implementation of strategies to improve their situation. For example, the older respondents, those with access to lower levels of income, those who did no work apart from their garbage picking, those not living with a partner and/or those not living with their parents had a more stigmatic meta-stereotype, loaded with more negative attributes. Meanwhile, a meta-stereotype with more indulgent attributes was used by both older pickers and by those whose only source of income was the garbage, and by pickers with higher incomes and those who lived with a partner and/or their parents. This could be due to the fact that the older pickers, and those whose only source of their meagre income was picking in the garbage, were less well integrated, interacting less and differently with the rest of the population - often due to the chronic nature of their picking work - who had more unequal contacts and of poorer quality with the population outside the dump, and who had suffered the consequences of stigma for longer and more acutely. Likewise, those not living with a partner or with their parents and those who had less income, who tended to have a higher mean age, could present different problems relating to the general population, both quantitatively and qualitatively, which could affect the different (negative and indulgent) attributes that they included in the meta-stereotype.

The pickers who did other paid work besides picking garbage, and those who lived with their partner and/or their parents used certain positive attributes in the meta-stereotype to a greater extent. In this respect, those who appeared to have more robust social networks and who for various reasons had better relationships with people outside their picking work tended to use a more positive, less stigmatizing stereotype, with probable positive effects on self-esteem, which could favour processes of social inclusion.

To a large extent, we found that the interviewees who declared the worst expectations for the future tended to consider that the general population perceived pickers as having more negative attributes (criminals, weak character, etc.). A subjective cognitive variable such as expectations for the future may also play a role in the construction of the meta-stereotype, thereby influencing the self-stigma.

In conclusion, it should be noted the meta-stereotypes used by the pickers are very uniform and mostly negative, and strongly related to the stigma suffered by their group. It should be noted, the great uniformity in the use of some indulgen meta-stereotypes by the pickers gives a certain dose of optimism towards the future.Unfortunately, among the pickers in León extreme poverty appears to be handed down from generation to generation (Vázquez & Panadero, 2016). The stigma and self-stigma that affect this group have an adverse effect on their lack of opportunities and significantly worsen the negative life circumstances in which they live, making the circumstances of most of those affected chronic in nature, and "condemning" the subsequent generations to the poverty and social exclusion suffered by their parents.

Ultimately, our work is directed to obtain useful information to assist the pickers in the processes of improving the situation in which they live. In this respect, and despite the major difficulties involved, it would be very interesting to design useful intervention strategies to promote the reduction of the stigma suffered by those who obtain their livelihoods through the garbage, while simultaneously fostering changes in their meta-stereotype, since these factors appear to have a significant influence on the relationship between the pickers and the general population.

The uniform use of some indulgent meta-stereotypes, is insufficient to support the social inclusion processes, yet, it can have some positive effects, given that feeling perceived in an indulgent manner, rather than in a negative manner, could influence positively in some aspects of interactions with the general population. Given the appropriate condition, the contact among both groups could encourage better mutual understanding, with a potential positive incidence in the stigma perceived by the pickers.

In addition to being a social need, ending the stigma and self-stigma that the pickers suffer from, and breaking the "vicious circle" of the "pseudohereditary" condition of poverty and social exclusion by promoting equal opportunities, is an ethical issue in which no effort should be spared.

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